

IN A BUSINESS WAY

BY
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THE PASSING OF E. C. BROWN.

With the death and burial of Edward Cooper Brown, which occurred during the past week, the curtain was rung down on the finale of one of the most spectacular, and in many ways remarkable life works of any business man of our group in the present generation.

Still a young man, as present day business men are wont to consider life spans—thanks to the example of John D. Rockefeller, Thomas A. Edison and their contemporaries—E. C. Brown had crowded into his 53 years of existence more of romance and accomplishment than has fallen to the lot of many men.

Comparatively few of the thousands of people who knew E. C. Brown in the height of his glory of achievement knew that he was a native son of Philadelphia. All inadvertently he did much dispell the too well accepted opinion that Northern born men are incapable of doing too well things, because their vision is obscured by the more or less freedom of opportunity on this side of the famous Smith and Wesson line.

The fact that E. C. Brown made his first big strides in the South, and came home to his native Philadelphia with the glamour of his accomplishments in the State of Virginia, made many people suppose that he was Southern born.

In a ridiculous article in the current issue of *Forum* magazine, Corra Harris called attention to the rarity of Northern born men succeeding in business in the South, mentioning the wonderful accomplishments of many Southern born men who had twisted the tail of Northern business and trade. Of course, Mrs. Harris was speaking of Nordic accomplishments, and can be pardoned for not having mentioned E. C. Brown as the exception which proved the rule.

Coming to Philadelphia full of the enthusiasm of his recent conquests in Virginia, Mr. Brown immediately set to work to do things here, and how well he succeeded is evidenced by many who felt the beneficial influence of his enthusiasm.

That he failed ultimately does not alter the fact that the existence of the finest theatre in America owned and controlled by Negroes stands today as a credit to his vision and initiative. Some there will be who will argue that the price we paid to have the Dunbar Theatre, was too high a price for an improvised people, thinking in terms of the thousands of dollars which were lost in the realization of Brown's dreams. But somehow or other it is not difficult to think that in spite of these losses, the Race is the victor in its own defeat. Just how much more respect white Philadelphians must have for their darker brethren because of their having built the Dunbar Theatre will be hard to determine, but certain it is that many white people think more kindly of the Race because of the existence of this playhouse.

And too, the first real effort to establish a Race bank in this city came about through the efforts of this man, who was probably much less imperfect than most of us are willing to admit. I am aware of the fact that two abortive attempts had previously been made to establish banks

before the advent of E. C. Brown, Banker. In 1900, John Clinton, Jr., attempted "The First Colored Bank North." His career was spectacular but short lived. A few years later Ex-Congressman George H. White attempted a small bank, and it was on the wreck of this venture that Brown built the structure which for a number of years increased the self-respect and fired the aspirations of thousands of colored people in the North and East.

Many successful business men of today owe much of their success to the existence of the organization founded by Brown.

True, the bank failed, just as thousands of other banks have failed, some directed by men of much greater genius than anyone could have expected a Negro to possess. But the intangible which still exists as a result of the bank's existence cannot fail. Greater desire to accomplish, instilled in the breasts of hundreds of younger men and women, has not failed.

Dunbar Theatre, as a business proposition, failed, but the desire to have better playhouses, and better actors, capable of earning better livelihoods, has not failed, if it is not a militant factor always at work.

It has ever been, and for a long time will continue to be hard to convince the man or woman who lost money in the failure of Brown's bank that there could come out of it any good. But wiser folk have not taken the failure of E. C. Brown so deeply to heart as to be unable or unwilling to see some of the success which are attributable to it.

One thing Brown did: He made quite a number of professional men realize that they owed somewhat of a debt to the community and the race which made their success possible. For the first time in a generation, a number of professional men saw fit to attempt to do something in a commercial way which might benefit the race. The fact that their attempt was a failure will not obscure the spirit shown by them in making the effort, and it is to be hoped that their failure will not have convinced them their efforts were in vain. The desire to help in the human struggle has been kindled in some of them, while the realization that they SHOULD help has more definitely dawned in the minds of others of them. Hence the price these pioneers paid has been money well expended.

"Fools rush in where angels fear to tread," so here goes with a hope that more of us will think more dispassionately of E. C. Brown and his work. Brown has passed on. Who can say that he did not do his best as he saw it? And if he did, who can do more?

So long, "Ed." See you later.